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ABSTRACT

A study was undertaken during 1982-83 to determine the number of lesson-hours it took to raise the reading level one grade of students (16 years of age and older) enrolled in Project: LEARN, a nonprofit Cleveland program that provides free reading and writing lessons to older youth and adults reading at third-grade level and below. Among them are immigrants learning English as a second language (25 percent of enrollees) and inmates at local correctional facilities. Volunteer tutors are recruited and trained, and the core material used is The Laubach Way to Reading. Of 181 students in the sample, 59 percent were black, 71 percent were male, 70 percent were unemployed or laid off, 31 percent were married, and 57 percent were under 35 years of age. The Adult Basic Learning Exam (ABLE) was used as a pretest and a posttest, with posttests occurring after 50 hours of lessons and 100 hours of lessons. The increase from the pretest to the first posttest was about one grade level. The second posttest showed an additional one-half grade-level gain. The posttest scores correlated more highly with the number of lessons completed than they did with the number of days in the program. Since the study, the project has stopped using the ABLE and started using the Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT). (CML)

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WHO'S LEARNING HOW TO READ AND HOW DO WE KNOW?

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Project: LEARN PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Project: LEARN is a non-profit educational corporation founded in 1974 under the sponsorship of the Interchurch Council. Project: LEARN's purpose is to enable illiterate adults to acquire the listening, speaking, reading and writing skills they need to solve the problems they encounter in their daily lives; to take full advantage of the opportunities they find in their environment; and to participate fully in the transformation of their society. The Project provides free, private basic reading and writing lessons for adults who read at the 3rd grade level and below. The persons served are 16 years of age and older and out of school. The Project was organized to provide service to the more than 40,000 adults in Cuyahoga County with less than five years of formal education.

Project: LEARN recruits sand trains volunteers to serve as tutors. The Laubach Way to Reading (LWR) is the core material that tutors are trained to use. The series of four Skill Books introduces basic reading and writing in a carefully sequenced series of lessons designed to teach adults from a level of zero literacy to a 6th grade level. The approach used in these materials is strongly phonics based and in every lesson the student will see it, hear it, say it, and write it down, using all the learning modalities. In addition to these core materials, tutors are trained in a variety of other tutoring skills that make it possible to meet an adult's learning style and reading needs. In 1987 the project trained and certified 356 new tutors.

In addition to this work in basic literacy, Project: LEARN recruits and trains volunteers to tutor foreign speakers. The tutors are trained to teach new immigrants to speak, understand and then read and write in English. The Laubach Way to English provides the necessary conversational skills to accompany the reading and writing lessons in the Laubach Way to Reading. More than 3,260 basic literacy and ESOL tutors have been trained to date.

Project: LEARN continues to provide tutoring to inmates at the Justice Center and in 1983 undertook a new effort to meet the basic literacy needs of inmates at the Mansfield Reformatory. At the completion of the one year demonstration at the Reformatory the program was made an integral part of the education program. Project: LEARN will continue to advocate for broader educational opportunities in Cleveland area correctional facilities.

One of the major problems a literacy project like Project: LEARN faces is the lack of adult-interest, low-vocabulary reading materials. Efforts to provide additional reading materials for low reading adults continue on two levels. First, Project: LEARN has an active Writers Group which writes and publishes both pleasure reading materials and "problem solving" literacy materials. A notable example of this second type is STUDYING FOR AN OHIO DRIVER'S LICENSE. Project: LEARN currently has over 90 supplementary books available to students learning to read.

In addition, BOOKS FOR ADULT NEWS READERS, first published by Project: LEARN in 1980, has been revised and the 1988 edition will be available to literacy projects and libraries all over the United States by early summer. This bibliography of adult interest/low reading level materials was developed to aid libraries in their efforts to provide more and better services.

Project: LEARN is a free, private, one-to-one tutoring program that recruits and trains volunteers to teach adults to read. The Project's purpose is to enable illiterate adults and older youth to acquire the basic listening, reading and writing skills needed to solve the problems they encounter in their daily lives; to take full advantage of opportunities in their environment; and to participate in the various social, political and economic affairs of their communities. Organized in 1974, Project: LEARN is sponsored by the Interchurch Council of Greater Cleveland and is an affiliate of Laubach Literacy Action. The Project provides tutors for both basic literacy instruction and in English for speakers of other languages. Students served are 16 years of age and older and out of school. Foreign speakers make up about 25% of the students, with the remainder being adults who need to learn to read the language they speak. Although the program serves students as young as 16, the preponderence of those enrolled are mid-20's and beyond in age. Since the assessment being discussed included only basic literacy students, only that population will be further described.

Project: LEARN is an urban program serving all of Cuyahoga County, Ohio, but the bulk of those served are residents of the city of Cleveland. Enrollees read at the third grade level and below with the majority reading 2.2 to 2.9 on entry. The population served is more black than white, more male than female. Schooling background ranges from no years of formal instruction to high school diploma. More than half are unemployed, and many of those who do work are marginally employed.

There were 698 students enrolled in the program at the end of June, being tutored by trained volunteers. Virtually all the tutors are high school graduates and a majority have at least some years of college. About 22% of the tutors are male and about 22% are black. The majority are past 40 years of age.

The Project is wholly funded by gifts and grants with about 35% of the budget coming from United Way. The remainder must be raised each year from foundations, corporations, churches, individuals and other sources.

1. During the two year period of 1982-83 Project: LEARN undertook to answer one of the most asked questions regarding our services and that question was "How many hours of lessons does it take to raise a reading level one grade?" The assessment done to answer that question was part of a larger effort to gather statistical information about the program and as part of the assessment we tried to identify any relationships or variables over which the program had control that could impinge on student progress or success. The overall assessment included student pre and post-testing, tutor responses to questionnaires and student responses to telephone interviews. Only the results of the student pre- and post-testing will be dealt with in this paper.

There were 181 students in the assessment sample. A majority were black (59%), male (71%), and unemployed or laid off (70%). Only 31% were married and most had no children at home (56%). The largest group were under 35 years of age (57%).

Years of schooling ranged from 6% who had none, to 56% who had some years of high school.

Up to the point at which this assessment began, Project: LEARN's assessment of student skills consisted of an intake interview done face to face in which the students were shown the materials they would be studying (The Laubach Way to Reading Series) and the content of the books was explained in general terms. The interviewer would attempt to learn as much as possible regarding the student's ability to do the early lessons without putting the student in a failure situation. The purpose of this general assessment was to learn more about what the students already knew about what the reading series teaches, so as to give guidance to the tutors as to how to adjust lessons to the students' prior knowledge.

When the more rigorous assessment effort began, incoming students were asked to take the ABLE (Adult Basic Learning Exam) in addition to the general survey of their skills in relation to the reading series to be used. The design of the assessment called for the student to be retested after 50 hours of lessons, using a second level of the ABLE, and retested again after 100 hours of lessons.

The results on the post-test were compared against 21 variables to determine if there were any predictors of progress or success, particularly any predictors over which Project: LEARN would have control. The most significant variables were number of lessons covered, number of days in the program and race of the student. The post-test scores were compared to the pre-test scores to determine if students increased their ABLE scores during the 50 hours of lessons between pre- and post-testing. It is reasonable to assume that the difference between the scores can be attributed to the lessons, i.e. to program impact.

The average score on the pre-test was 17.17, while the average on the post-test was 29.26. In terms of grade equivalent analysis (which may or may not be totally relevant to adult learners) the increase amounts to about one grade level. The second post-test, done after 100 hours, showed an additional one half grade level gain. However, it must be noted that a much smaller number of students took the second post-test as compared to the first. It is not possible to state this gain in categorical terms. However, since gains were shown at both the 50 and 100 hour mark it is fair to assume that the longer one stays active in the program, the greater the expected reading improvement.

The researcher who designed and carried out this assessment used regression analysis to determine the relationships between the number of days and hours in the program and the number of lessons completed. When students were post-tested at 50 hours they had completed 30 lessons, on average. The post-test score correlated with the "number of lessons completed" much more than it did to the number of days in the program.

This chart shows this relationship:

Number of Students	Number of Lessons Completed	ABLE Pre-test	ABLE Post-test
29	0-50	14.97 (1.1)*	25.29 (1.9)*
21	51-100	20.69 (1.5)*	30.87 (2.8)*

Relationships among the number of lessons completed and the ABLE pre-test and Post-test
* Grade Equivalents

The only other variable that the researcher was able to identify that showed a relationship to student progress was the variable of whether the student was able to purchase his or her own books. This was not considered a significant relationship because it is likely related to the student's employment or socio-economic status. It is likely an indicator of a more stable personal life which would allow a student to stay in more hours and cover more lessons, the real indicators of likely success.

There was one additional variable that indicated a tendency for whites to score higher than blacks on the post-test. Analysis of this data showed the following;

a) black students on the whole scored 3.1 points lower on the pre-test than white students.
b) black students who stayed in for 50 or more hours of tutoring had pre-test socres that average 3.9 points higher than blacks as a whole, and equal to the pre-test score of whites as a whole.
c) there was no difference between the pre-test scores of white students as a whole and white students who accomplished 50 or more hours of lessons.
d) white students, on average, scored 6 points higher on the post-test than black students did.

Further analysis showed that black students at the 50 hour/post-test level averaged 44 lessons, white students averaged 56 lessons. Given the strong correlation between lessons covered and reading gain this difference in lessons covered could be the major factor in accounting for the difference in post-test scores based on race. A second factor was days in the program. Black students at post-test averaged 17 days longer in the program than white students.

What accounts for this slower coverage of lessons in the same number of hours but over a longer span of days? It may reflect missed lessons or breaks in lessons and a greater need to spend time in review of previously covered material. This question would warrant further examination in future assessment/evaluation strides.

It should be noted that this kind of information gathering and statistical analysis is very time consuming, expensive and difficult to carry out, particularly in a program like Project: LEARN where the bulk of tutoring is carried out in settings all over the community. In order for us to do this kind of assessment it was necessary to get a foundation grant that permitted us to hire a data gatherer, someone whose job it was to track the lessons and notify tutors that their students were nearing the 50 hours of lessons mark so that the student could be re-tested at the proper time. It was also necessary to hire a researcher to do the design, analyze the gathered data and write the report. Having done this pre-test/post-test analysis, and the funding over, we have not continued to do this kind of rigorous assessment of student progress. We believe that we have answered that question for this program and it is not necessary for us to answer it again, at least not yet.

What we have continued to gather is data on how long students are in the program, how many hours of lessons they have completed and how many lessons they have completed as this information relates directly to what we know about progress based on the pre- and post-testing that has been done.

Our somewhat imcomplete and unsophisticated computer records showed the following current data:

There were 446 basic literacy students enrolled, 139 (31%) of whom were new in 1988 and 28 of whom were waiting for a new tutor, (not currently having lessons). To examine the number of hours of lessons, we would eliminate both that 28 and the 63 students who entered since April 1 who could not realistically be expected to have had 50 hours of lessons in this short time. This leaves 355 student records for analysis.

Of the total of 355 possibles, 31% (76) were new in the first quarter of '88 and likely to be under 50 hours in their maximum possible 6 months experience. 93 (25%) had 50 or more hours of lessons, the average hours for one grade level of reading growth. Of that number 43 had more than 100 hours and one student had over 700 hours! Of those with under 50 hours there were 27 students (7.6%) with 30 to 49 hours of lessons and an equal number with 20-29 hours of lessons. We are just now to the point where we can program the computer to track these evidences of growth over time.

The second indicator was 30 lessons equal to one grade level (on average). Thirty lessons would be equal to Skill Book 3, lesson 2. How many of the 355 students now in the program have reached that level? Of the 355 who could reasonably be included as possible to achieve this goal, 162 (45%) were at this level or above. 93 had completed less than 50 hours of lessons and 69 had completed more than 50 hours.

It should be noted that reporting on lessons covered is more variant than number of hours, with 5 "unknown" listings and 12 reports of studying other than the Skill Book series (Challenger, Cursive Writing, Citizenship, Short Stories, ABE materials, miscellaneous).

Since completing the study done in '82 -'83 Project: LEARN has abandoned the ABLE as a student assessment tool and have begun to use the Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT). We made the change because we initiated a 4th to 8th grade level program. We were referring students based on their ABLE scores (4th grade and above), and when they tested on the WRAT on entrance to that program their scores were much lower. There was a very wide and unexplained divergence in the scores. However, the experience of the mid-level program was that if students did not test 3.9 or above on the WRAT they would not be able to keep up and be successful at this more advanced level.

2. Because Project: LEARN uses The Laubach Way to Reading as the core of the tutoring program, the volunteer tutors are taught to use the assessments that come at the end of each book in that series as a guide to how well students are progressing and mastering reading skills. Those assessments are to be returned to headquarters for review and remain in student files. In addition, tutor calendars indicating lessons covered are under constant review for indications that students are in need of additional resources to solidify their gains. Tutors are continuously encouraged to be in touch with staff for additional advice and resources.

3. What works best for us at the present time is a combination of assessing what individual students already know about what we teach in the core program, their performance on the WRAT and having them indicate the specific goals that they have as regards their reading. Having a baseline of information regarding the general impact of hours and lessons on reading gain allows us to continuously monitor program impact.

4. There are many pitfalls in assessment. Balancing the students' need for success and aversion to testing with the program's need to answer question about program impact is a difficult proposition. There are, in my opinion, NO good instruments to use at the level at which we work. The ABLE exam was normed on Job Corps participants, generally younger and with more years of schooling than Project: LEARN students. The assessment we undertook had every potential for disaster for us.

The test does not test what we teach. In addition our students are devoid of test taking skills which can impact on their performance on the test, as does their high anxiety about ANY testing situation. I also believe that adult literacy programs need to question the emphasis that tends to require a showing of "grade" level changes and performance on nationally standardized tests coupled with a disdain for the anecdotal evidence of program success. Given the low level of students we serve, the attitudinal changes they evidence that don't show up on standardized tests may in fact be a prerequisite for improved performance on the standardized tests down the road.

When 94% of former students indicated, on follow up, that they were continuing to read, study, and in other ways use their reading skills, that is not an insignificant piece of information. An additional pitfall is the diversion of time, effort and resources away from program and into data gathering and the continual answering of questions that may or may not be relevant. Virtually no literacy programs for adults have been funded at levels that permit them to operate as effectively as they know how to do. Short on the resources needed to do the job, we're not scrambling to show that we can do the job anyway. Catch 23?

Data gathering is enormously difficult. When we started we lost people out of the sample because for the first three months of the period we were placing students from the waiting list for whom we had no pre-tests. At the end of our assessment period we had dozens of students who could not be included, even though we had a pre-test on them, because they had not been in the program long enough to have 50 hours of lessons.

An additional difficulty was that the reading series was revised in the middle of the evaluation, which may or may not have affected outcomes for some students. There was not enough data to examine this question.

What hasn't worked is on-going standardized post-testing of students at some point in the program (other than the regular assessment built into the reading series) or post-testing on leaving the program. We simply do not have the staff or resources for that kind of an effort.

5. Answering a question regarding a single motivating factor about the program is impossible except to say that students come into it because it is a private one-to-one turoring program. Movement towards the achievement of reading goals or life goals related to reading is the underlying motivator. Sustaining motivation over the time it takes to achieve relatively high level goals for adults with these low skill levels is a very difficult prospect. We attempt a wide variety of efforts to recognize and reward student progress.

6. When students enter the program they are asked if they have a specific thing they hope to be able to do when they are better readers. That information is given to the tutor. In addition tutors are constantly encouraged to ask students to bring things they are interested in or wanting to be able to read and to make those things part of the lessons. Tutors have received training in the use of supplementary materials. Information on achievement of student goals is not gathered in a systematic way at the present time. The most consistently reported is when students get a driver's license. (We have written an easy to read guide for studying for a license).

7. The program has been modified over time in attempts to be more responsive to student goals and interests. The training of tutors was reorganized to include a wider variety of tutoring possibilities to help tutors better respond to students' reading

interests, needs and wants and to equip tutors to at least recognize when students have a learning difficulty that might need additional resources. We have attempted to develop a resource bank of advisors to provide advice and assistance to tutors, and when it seems appropriate, to provide deeper student assessment. We have greatly enlarged the variety of supplementary materials available to tutors and students. We have undertaken a variety of student recognition and motivational activities. We hope in the near future to link with some appropriate job/training programs.

8. We have barely the ability to provide the consistent follow-up with our current student and tutor population that is required if we are to maintain an acceptable level of quality programming. We have almost no capacity for follow-up although we are in touch with some students, know some who have moved on to our mid-level program, etc. Because a large percentage of students live rather marginal lives, follow-up is very difficult; moved, disconnected phones are major barriers to follow-up.

9. We link with local support groups any which way we can. We often initiate requests for resource assistance, whether it be financial, programmatic or technical assistance. For example, we initiated contact with group members of the International Reading Association and the Educational Resources Center at Cleveland State University for assistance regarding the teaching of the learning disabled. We are linked to a wide variety of youth tutoring programs and Adult Basic Education programs through the Greater Cleveland Literacy Coalition. I would doubt that any of these programs would be able to provide any better answers to questions regarding whether those who enroll have learned to read better.

10. We hope to make better use of the diagnostic materials for The Laubach Way to Reading that are now available. We have used them some and believe they would be most helpful in placing students who are being rematched after having been out of the program or without a tutor for a time. If we had the resources (staff time) we would like to do an additional set of post-testing using the WRAT that we currently use as a pre-test. We would like to do follow-up with students to see how many are using self-selected materials in the lessons. We would like to find a useful assessment of student learning styles that could be used to provide more guidance to volunteers on how to work around student learning differences.

We have undertaken pre-post testing on content area skills in our 4th-8th grade level program (basic science and American History in particular). We have begun an additional assessment using the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE); a research study on the findings will be completed in 1989. We've already confirmed that the students lack a knowledge base in these subjects but that is a different story for a different day.